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ABSTRACT

On the surface, the quality and quantity of openings for entry-level professors seeking to teach undergraduate educational foundations courses seem to indicate a dismal future for the foundations field. Positions advertised in a professional journal suggest not only the paucity of positions available, but also the low status of foundations courses, which are most often taught by nonfoundations professors. The role of foundations courses has been debated since the establishment of the first foundations department at Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1934. In 1977, the American Educational Studies Association (AESA) Task Force on Academic Standards clarified the objectives of foundations coursework in teacher education, suggesting that, by focusing on the study of education as a field of inquiry, preservice teachers can critique and reflect on pedagogical technique in light of an understanding of education as a complex social institution. However, diverse interpretations of the role of foundations courses still exist at the undergraduate level, allowing hiring practices and teaching loads that imply little respect for the field. Programs that prepare professors to teach undergraduate foundations courses must reflect an integrative and interdisciplinary aspect; specializations can be accommodated through minors in other educational fields. It is up to education foundations professors to take reponsibility for defining and refining the field at all academic levels. (FG)

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PHANTOMS, FACTS, AND FUTURES: THE FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

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PHANTOMS, FACTS, AND FUTURES:
THE FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

Loren Eiseley once wrote a poem in which he talked about seeing beyond the obvious. In "The Green Lion" he said:

> There is a green lion in the bush at the end of the path.
> If I do not look at him directly I can see the blink of a green eyelid. I can see
> the muzzle, the ears, the face in the foliage, green when the wind blows.
> He blinks, or perhaps a leaf blinks for him. I know I am nearsighted, see such forms everywhere.[1]

Eiseley lived among the clay shards and fragmented skeletons that are the stuff of archeology and learned that interpretation, even empirically based interpretation, is an act of faith. At sixty he could see bush and lion simultaneously and wonder at the fact of the dual reality saying:

> This is the secret:
> There is a green lion in the bush at the end of the path.
> If I do not look at him, he blinks,
> True he may be a leaf, but I see him, that is the secret.
> After sixty summers one sees life mostly behind one's eyelids, the forms in the mind peep out readily as a green lion from a bush.[2]

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[1]Loren Eiseley, "The Green Lion," in The Innocent Assassins (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), p. 15, lines 1-9.

[2]Ibid., p. 16, lines 34-41.

We who choose to be involved in the foundations of education could learn much from Eiseley about multiple realities, about seeing beyond the obvious, and the presence of green lions. Our field is now nearly fifty years old and amidst the closing of some foundations departments and the seeming absence of positions for young professors, it may indeed seem that the potential of our endeavor exists only behind our collective eyelids--a phantoms lion in an ordinary bush. The challenge in that, I think, is to make the phantoms real, to try to interpret the "obviously dismal" facts about the state of educational foundations in accordance with the belief in the importance of our work that has nourished our development thus far.

More directly stated, my purpose here is to raise the possibility that the facts which are usually interpreted as the fading pulse of a dying profession could be the indicators of a rejuvenating shift in perspective. Particularly, I will focus on the current employment possibilities for young professors and their implications for the evolution of the foundations of education.

Anyone who would assert that these are easy times for individuals seeking to enter the professorate of educational foundations could rightfully be banished from this group. The evidence says otherwise. In

twenty-eight issues of The Chronicle of Higher Education published between September 2, 1981 and April 28, 1982 only two announcements under the generic headings of Education or Education-slash-something were described as being positions with a major emphasis in educational foundations. As if to underscore the current crisis, one of these positions was listed as being one-year, non-renewable. An additional five announcements indicated positions in areas of specialization that have traditionally been considered foundational (e.g. anthropological studies of education, multicultural education).

Finding reasons to explain the paucity of entry level positions is not a particularly difficult task. The phenomenon of tenured-in faculties is playing a role here as in other areas of academe.[3] An increasing emphasis on field-based undergraduate teacher education may be limiting the foundations component in programs and thus the number of faculty needed. And, the general perception (accurate or not) that teaching is not a viable professional option may contribute to declines in enrollment and therefore in faculty positions in all areas of education. There is some truth in each of these explanations. None of it is, however, especially comforting

[3]See, for example, Philip G. Altbach, "The 'Graying' of the Academic Profession," Educational Studies 10 (Spring 1979), 31-34.

to the new Ph.D. Yet, before descending into the malaise of doubt and depression that too typically characterizes discussions about the future of educational foundations, I must remind you that my purpose here is to try to look beyond these "obviously dismal" facts.

One question emerges immediately. That is whether the seven announcements of openings referred to represent the reality of the employment opportunities for new professors. The data is clearly limited by its source. Not all faculty openings are listed in the Chronicle and the issues cited are a relatively limited sampling of that. Beyond that, though, is the fact that the seven announcements I have referred to represent only those openings defined as being in educational foundations by title or areas of specialization. In the same issues of the Chronicle fourteen announcements of entry level positions in education listed foundational areas[4] as part of a job description. Generally, these descriptions can be characterized as falling into two categories. Three of the announcements were combinations of foundations with another educational field--educational foundations and curriculum, for example. The other eleven included

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[4]Foundational areas were identified by reference to the list of course descriptors used by Lucas and Cockriel in their assessment of foundations in teacher preparation programs. See, Christopher J. Lucas and Irvin W. Cockriel, "The Foundations of Education in Teacher Preparation: A National Assessment," Educational Studies 11 (1981): 353.

foundations course titles or areas among a laundry list of competencies needed for the position. Two examples will suffice, I think, to illustrate the laundry list phenomenon: 1) A position at a small private college in Iowa was listed as requiring the following competency areas--elementary education/methods, child development, and introduction to education. And, 2) a public community college in Florida indicated that the position there could involve teaching introduction to education, social foundations, human development, and coaching women's basketball or volleyball. The institutions announcing these combination or laundry list types of positions tend to be small (under 5,000 total student enrollment) and generally offer only undergraduate degrees in education.

On the surface, entry level positions that include foundations with other educational areas may seem a poor substitute for the kinds of positions for which doctoral students have been educated. Professors in educational foundations are usually educated in large institutions in which the foundations faculty has instructional roles and institutional status (e.g. a department within a college of education) that distinguish them from other professors of education. This structuring has always been somewhat problemmatic since the field is not clearly

defined,[5] but the fact remains that the foundations professorate is socialized in an environment in which the academic study of education is viewed as being quite different from the professional education of preservice teachers. Further, the professors in such institutions have frequently been educated in the tradition of the academic disciplines and use this model as the basis for educating the next generation of foundations professors. The net effect of these factors in the socialization process can be the expectation that a "real" foundations position will not be concerned with content area instruction, psychology and development, supervision of student teachers, etc.

Purists, of course, can argue that the academic study of education must not be contaminated by concern with the practical issues of teacher education. I am reminded of the story of a group of mathematicians who meet every Friday with a mug of ale and toast, "To math, may it never be of any use to anyone." The growth of mathematically dependent technology would seem to indicate that at least some of their students turned a deaf ear to the toast. But, it is not only an interest in employment that should cause us to question a purist's

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[5]See, for example, John Walton and James L. Kuethe, eds., The Discipline of Education (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963).

conceptualization of the foundations of education for the combination and laundry list entry level job descriptions raise real questions about the future of the field in general.

Since the founding of the first foundations department at Teachers College Columbia University in 1934, there has been a continuous effort to define the specific nature of foundational inquiry and its role in educational development. As social reconstructionists, the founders believed that the study of education from a variety of disciplinary perspectives would lead to the development of a body of knowledge that could be used to improve practice. The academic study of education, then, was seen as the means to an end, the end being the improvement of education at all levels. By the founding of the AESA in 1968, foundational inquiry itself had taken precedence over the potential application of foundational knowledge as the focus of attention. In its constitution, the purpose of the AESA was stated as being, "...to promote the academic study of the educative process and the school as a fundamental societal institution."[6] In part, the emphasis on foundations as a field of study can be seen as a struggle to establish the identity of the field. Addressing the

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[6]Quoted in, John A. Laska, "Current Progress in the Foundations of Education," The Record-Teachers College 71 (1969): 179.

issue of identity, Laska wrote in 1969:

> Briefly, we can say that an academic field is one in which knowledge is sought without specific regard for its utilization, while a professional field is one in which knowledge is sought to meet the requirements of an identifiable occupation (or occupations).[7]

The focus on defining the foundations as a field of study, however, exacerbated the problem of conceptualizing the purpose of foundations coursework within teacher education programs. That is a particularly relevant concern for professors who teach traditionally professional courses and foundations courses to the same students.

Laska argues that foundations courses represent the component of professional education in which students acquire knowledge about education that is not directly related to issues of practice. Comparing education to law, he writes:

> Since a student enrolled in a professional training program requires academic instruction as well as purely professional training, some of the academic instruction that is an essential component of the professional training program may be provided within the professional department, school or college. Thus, for example, a law student ordinarily receives his instruction in jurisprudence--which is an academic subject--from the faculty of the law school, rather than from the arts and sciences faculty of the university.
>
> The study of education in the typical American university is quite comparable to the study of law. Although the departments, schools and colleges of education are primarily involved in purely professional

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[7]Ibid., p. 180.

> training, they also provide courses in the academic study of education.[8]

In stating that foundations courses are an "essential component" of professional education, Laska assumes, he says, that:

> In the teaching of an academic field, the impartation of a body of scholarly knowledge is the principal concern; it is assumed that anyone possessing this body of knowledge will be able to make whatever practical applications are later required.[9]

The assumption is problemmatic because it does not clarify either the ways in which using foundational knowledge can enhance professionalism or the reasons for doing so. The problem is not with defining the academic study of education as the focus of foundational inquiry. Rather, it is with describing, rather than merely assuming, the role of such inquiry and the knowledge gained from it within the teacher education curriculum.

In 1977, the AESA Task Force on Academic Standards took on just that problem. The Standards state that: "At least one-sixth of the professional preparation leading to initial teaching certification is to be devoted to humanistic and social foundational studies..."[10] Further, the Standards assert that:

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[8]Ibid., p. 181.

[9]Ibid., p. 180.

[10]AESA Task Force on Academic Standards, "Standards for Academic and Professional Instruction in Foundations of Education, Educational Studies and Educational Policy Studies," Educational Studies 8(1977): 336.

> The general objectives of these foundational studies are to introduce students to interpretive uses of knowledge germane to education and to establish a basis for life-long learning through normative and critical reflection on education within its historical, philosophical, cultural, and social contexts.[11]

What the Task Force Standards may represent most clearly is a recognition that the academic study of education--which represents a field of inquiry--provides a body of knowledge and methodologies for inquiry that have definable purposes in teacher preparation. In contrast to "cookbook" approaches, then, teacher preparation that includes foundational coursework is designed to enrich and enhance practice by helping pre-service teachers to critique and reflect on the meaning of pedagogical techniques in light of an understanding of education as a complex social institution. The knowledge about education makes the difference between teachers who are bound to the immediate and visible concerns of classroom life and those who can see the linkages between those concerns and larger societal issues. As Broudy argues, foundations coursework nurtures those abilities and, thus, plays an important role in professional development. He writes:

> Either the teachers are to have a craft training only, in which case their right to a share in

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[11]Ibid., p. 336.

> policy making is no better than that of any other citizen; or the preparation of the teacher has to become genuinely professional, which means more foundational study, not less than is now prescribed.[12]

By clarifying the objectives of foundations course-work in teacher education, the Academic Standards indicate ways in which positions that include foundations with other educational areas can contribute to the continued development of the field. If the purpose of the foundations courses is to aid pre-service teachers in developing critical and evaluative capabilities, then the professor who teaches, say, foundations and secondary methods is in a unique position to demonstrate how those capabilities can be used to make sound professional judgments. The discussion, for instance, of educational equality in a foundations course can be shown to have professional relevance to a student who is preparing a social studies unit concerning access to occupations. Combination or laundry list positions, then, could provide a unique opportunity for foundations professors to investigate more closely the role of foundations in professional education. Where Laska assumed that students would make appropriate applications of foundational knowledge, the professor who teaches both professional and foundational courses can develop instructional

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[12]Harry S. Broudy, "The Role of the Foundational Studies in the Preparation of Elementary Teachers," in, Foundation Studies in Education, Margaret Gillett and John A. Laska, eds., (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1973), p. 153.

situations in which such applications can be encouraged, enhanced, and studied.

We should recognize, however, that the occurance of foundations among a laundry list of competencies can represent a threat as well as an opportunity. Too often foundations is "tacked on" to a job description revealing that, in terms of institutional priorities, foundations is in an "also ran" position relative to other educational areas. Further, such descriptions may imply the perception that any professor of education is qualified to teach undergraduate foundations courses. This phenomenon, which one colleague refers to as the "ex-superintendent" factor, was brought home to me as reality recently when the chairperson of a department of education in a small liberal arts college told me that: "Everyone in this department is qualified to teach foundations." That is not an isolated instance. Lucas and Cockriel found in 1981 that:

> In public institutions, only 40% of those teaching foundations courses had received their highest degree in the field of instruction. For private institutions the percentage fell even lower (to 21%), making for a combined average of 29%. Hence, in a "typical" or "average" SCDE (school, college, or department of education), chances would be only about one out of three that a faculty member teaching a course in foundations of education actually majored in the field at the graduate level.[13]

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[13]Lucas and Cockriel, "National Assessment," p. 341.

We are faced with a frightening contradiction. At a time when foundations graduates find it difficult, if not impossible to find entry level positions, undergraduate foundations courses are most often taught by non-foundations professors. The perception, then, that anyone can teach foundations may be grounded on the fact that, in many institutions, they have been taught by anyone.

It is with some trepidation that I state that at least some of the responsibility for this situation must rest squarely on our own shoulders. In the effort to establish the credibility of foundations as an academic field, an emphasis has been placed on specialization rooted in the academic disciplines. While that specialization has produced valuable scholarship, it may have prevented the development of an interdisciplinary perspective needed to produce an integrated body of knowledge that would be distinguishable as foundations. Thus, in a 1979 study of the foundations component in state teacher certification standards, Lucas could find little consensus about the appropriate content or emphases for undergraduate foundations courses.[14] Quite simply, what appears to have happened is that foundations have been defined in terms of the disciplines at the graduate level and have not yet been defined in any stipulative way at the

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[14]Christopher J. Lucas, "The Foundations of Education Component in State Regulations Governing Teacher Preparation and Initial Certification," Educational Studies 10 (1979): 1-29.

undergraduate level. The door, then, has been left open for diverse interpretations of what a foundations course should be and for hiring practices that imply little respect for the field.

There is evidence, however, that progress is being made in terms of the development of a truly integrative and interpretive foundations perspective. Bernier and McClelland stated recently:

> The apparent decline in the importance of the foundations of education in the preparation of educators may be less significant, however, than assumed. In part, it is not a decline at all but a shift in programmatic emphasis. As foundational programs are designed to reflect a more integrated perspective, those foundations scholars who view themselves as allied to a specific discipline, are in many cases, now expected to become interdisciplinary and to teach courses that reflect a more holistic educational studies perspective.
>
> This is not the case in the prestigious professional education institutions, where foundations positions are often filled by academicians from the traditional disciplines. Specialists in a specialized field of foundations of education are luxaries which only the most prestigious universities can afford. Indeed, the health of the field of foundations is most clearly seen on campuses which serve regional populations, where the demands imposed by educational practicioners have not allowed foundations educators to escape the requirements of interpretation and application of knowledge.[15]

To make the point quite bluntly, the future of the foundations of education does not depend on our receiving a collective nod of approval from the faculties of colleges

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[15]Normand Bernier and Averil McClelland, "Foundations of Education: Towards a Generative Model," Journal of Teacher Education (in press): 7-8. [Manuscript].

of arts and sciences. Rather, it may depend on our ability to assert our right to and to take responsibility for our venue in the field of professional undergraduate education. To that end, the AESA Standards can become a landmark in the development of our profession if they are pushed to their full implementation. That will mean continuing to push for the inclusion of foundational coursework in teacher education curricula and a continuing effort to articulate the reasons for doing so. It will also mean that there must be a concerted effort to insure that, as the Standards state:

> The foundational component of the professional preparation program is to be developed and conducted or supervised by persons who meet the qualifications of standard six. As a rule, these faculty members will be identified with the Foundations, Educational Studies, or Educational Policy Studies.[16]

The fact that 2 out of 3 undergraduate foundations courses is taught by a non-foundations person cannot be tolerated. Yet, we must reckon with the fact that in many small institutions the hiring of a full-time professor for the exclusive purpose of teaching foundations courses is a fiscal impossibility.

Standard VI specifies that:

> Doctoral programs in Foundations of Education... offer concentrated, advanced preparation in at least one of the following disciplines or areas of study

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[16]AESA Task Force, "Standards," p. 337.

> and general preparation in at least two others: history, philosophy, sociology, politics, and economics of education; religion and education; anthropology and education; educational psychology; comparative and international education; educational studies; and educational policy studies.[17]

The interpretation of this standard is critical, particularly as it applies to the preparation of professors to teach at the undergraduate level. In stating that: "The distinctive focus of the programs is the interpretive, normative, and critical examination of education through the framework of the...disciplines or areas of study..,"[18] the Task Force implies that foundations is characteristically an integrative field. Thus, while the methodologies for the study of education may be rooted in the academic disciplines, the purpose of foundations is not to ape the specialization which so frequently characterizes work in those areas. Overspecialization could prove dysfunctional if allowed to dominate in the academic study of education, a fact that is addressed in the portion of Standard VI which reads: "The complexities involved in each of these [doctoral] programs make it necessary that candidates be prepared with more than a single perspective."[19]

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[17] Ibid., pp. 340-341.

[18] Ibid., p. 341.

[19] Ibid.

Since the core of foundations is the study of education, which is a complex institution, no single disciplinary perspective will suffice. Particularly, in undergraduate education where the purpose of foundations is to insure that pre-service professionals are able to investigate and understand those complexities, the focus of foundations must be interdisciplinary and interpretive rather than specialized. Programs that prepare professors to teach in these programs must likewise reflect an integrative and interdisciplinary perspective.

The understanding of foundations as an interdisciplinary field, however, cannot be loosely applied. While it would be advantageous, in terms of employment opportunities, for programs to be designed which allow for the development of competencies outside the foundations field, those competencies cannot be allowed to replace the traditional foundational areas. The integrity of the field would be threatened, for instance, if graduate coursework in curriculum were allowed to become a part of the foundations component of a program. Individualized programs, however, can take the exigencies of the job market into account through the development of minor or dual major work in another educational area. Where traditionally a doctoral program in foundations might include a minor in, say, sociology; in preparing an individual for a combination type position, the minor

would be in an area such as early childhood education. Dual major programs might include combinations such as foundations and curriculum & instruction or secondary education. The point here is that the interdisciplinary nature of foundations represents a tradition of inquiry that need not, indeed, should not be sacrificed in our effort to prepare individuals for positions that have not usually been filled by foundations people. Rather, such programs should be designed with the thought in mind that the individuals prepared in them must have a truly foundational background since they will be in unique positions to insure that the foundations are accurately represented in undergraduate education programs.

The perception that "anyone can teach undergraduate foundations" represents a threat to the field and will only be defeated if we take on the tasks of defining and refining our field at all levels of academe. Clearly, fourteen job announcements over an eight month period do not represent endless opportunities. They are, however, an indication that the more fertile ground for the growth of educational foundations and for the employment of young professors is in undergraduate education rather than in graduate level, research-oriented programs. If Lucas and Cockriel's figures are accurate, there is much new territory to be claimed. The future of foundations is

not a phantom green lion and if we are willing to look beyond the obvious and to take on new challenges we may be able to say with Eiseley:

> He is truly there. I saw him. I saw him blink. The green lion.[20]

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[20] Eiseley, "Green Lion," p. 16, lines 41-43.